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Chairman: Mr. Belinga-Eboutou ..... (Cameroon)
later: Ms. Londoño (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Colombia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 110: Advancement of women (A/58/3, 38, 161, 167 and Add.1, 168, 169, 341, 374, 417 and A/58/16)

Agenda item 111: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (A/58/3 and 166)

1. **Ms. King** (Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women), introducing the two items, said that the dramatic events of 2003 — the heightened threat of terrorism, the bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, slow progress in development, plummeting life expectancy in countries affected by HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation and the impasse at the recent World Trade Organization negotiations in Cancún, Mexico, — had raised questions about the future role of the United Nations. However, if the international community pulled together within a common framework, it would break through a period of uncertainty and find the way forward once more.

2. The Millennium Development Goals had emerged from the commitment by world leaders to address common threats collectively and promote human rights and democracy. As part of a new architecture for international dialogue ushered in by General Assembly resolution 57/270, a series of events were planned for 2005, the major one being a conference to review all commitments made in the Millennium Declaration. The challenge before the Committee was to use that architecture to ensure that gender perspectives were fully integrated into those events. She would welcome views from the Committee on what should be the main areas of focus.

3. Globalization must be harnessed for the benefit of all the world's people. Many negative aspects still existed; the 2003 *Human Development Report* of the United Nations Development Programme noted that, while globalization had contributed to economic growth and poverty reduction in much of the world, it had bypassed hundreds of millions, especially women and girls. The World Bank had also found a clear link between gender inequality and persistent poverty. The Commonwealth Secretariat had similarly stated that only by expanding women's access to assets could countries widen women's share in growth.

4. Women's full enjoyment of their human rights was a second challenge. Since the Beijing Conference, 23 States had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, bringing the total number of States parties to 174. She appealed to those Member States which had not done so to ratify the Convention by 2005. All those who struggled to achieve the rights of women must be greatly heartened by the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Ms. Shirin Ebadi, an Iranian lawyer. The Prize was a personal triumph for her, but also gave recognition to a group of unsung heroes fighting for women's human rights around the world.

5. Women continued to face varying degrees of violence in all its forms, a third challenge. The outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly had called for zero tolerance of violence against women. Trafficking in women and girls was a particularly hideous form of that violence, and the international community had a strong instrument to combat that scourge with the recent entry into force of the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Its Protocol to Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, would enter into force on 25 December 2003.

6. No list of major challenges would be complete, however, without mentioning the deadly impact of HIV/AIDS on women, especially in southern Africa.

7. More effort was needed to change the situation of women in the critical areas of decision-making and the peace process. Women were still severely underrepresented in higher levels of government — there were only 10 women heads of State or Government, and women accounted for only about 15 per cent of the membership of the world's parliaments. Within the United Nations itself, there were fewer women heads of organizations, and out of 191 Member States, only eight women permanent representatives. Women professionals within the United Nations system remained around 35 per cent, well below the target of 50 per cent. One of the statistics of greatest concern was that the pool of middle-level professional women at the P-4 and P-5 levels was actually declining. A related area was the role of women in peace processes.

Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) had given great impetus to the incorporation of gender perspectives in field missions, and references to women and gender mainstreaming were beginning to appear in Council resolutions. To meet those challenges, gender mainstreaming through the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality continued to be the major strategy, working with Secretariat departments and other offices to incorporate gender aspects into their substantive work.

8. The situation of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) was set out in document A/58/417. INSTRAW had continued to carry out a very modest programme due to financial constraints. Qualified candidates for the vacant post of Director of the Institute had been identified and the appointment process was proceeding. A separate report on the financial situation was being prepared.

9. The task ahead would require commitment and compromise. Above all it required keeping the ultimate goal in sight of making a difference in the lives of women and girls in every country.

10. **Ms. Hannan** (Director, Division for the Advancement of Women) introduced the reports of the Secretary-General submitted under agenda items 110 and 111. She highlighted the linkages between achievements in the areas of poverty eradication, environmental protection and the promotion of human rights, democracy and good governance on the one hand, and the empowerment of women and promotion of gender equality on the other. There was a growing recognition that gender equality was a core concern for development in any area, and that the failure to address gender dimensions not only exacerbated inequality between women and men but compromised the achievement of all other development goals. She hoped that the Committee would send a strong message that commitment to gender equality should be taken fully into account in implementing policies and programmes at the national, regional and international levels.

11. **Ms. Heyzer** (Executive Director, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)) said that, as the report on the activities of UNIFEM (A/58/168) illustrated, the themes of human development, human security and a world free of violence were at the heart of all its programmes. The Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women were the framing documents which guided its work; they created an ambitious series of commitments that had been reaffirmed by the inclusion of gender equality and women's empowerment as one of the Millennium Development Goals.

12. UNIFEM placed women's human rights at the centre of its programming, and the Convention served as a cornerstone in that respect. It was a key entry point for UNIFEM to support accountability by Governments to their commitments to gender equality. With the generous support of the Canadian Government, UNIFEM had conducted a programme on the implementation of the Convention in seven countries of south-east Asia, and in Kenya it had advocated the use of the Convention as a critical reference in reviewing the country's Constitution.

13. UNIFEM had continued to promote women's participation in leadership. Both the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals had set a target of 30 per cent for women in parliaments, and quotas and other affirmative-action measures had proven to be key to increasing their participation. Another focus was support for women's participation in peace processes to ensure a gender perspective in post-conflict reconstruction.

14. In situations of war as well as peace, violence against women manifested itself. UNIFEM was gaining experience and expertise in defining the nexus between violence against women and such crises as armed conflict and HIV/AIDS. In the context of globalization, for example, the increasing numbers of migrant women workers often lacked basic rights and therefore were extremely vulnerable to violence. UNIFEM had embarked on an initiative with the Jordanian Government to strengthen the rights of women workers and prevent abuse by formulating a minimum-standard contract for household workers. The HIV/AIDS pandemic was fuelled by the lack of gender equality. Women currently constituted 50 per cent of all people living with AIDS, and new and innovative partnerships had been established with networks of HIV-positive women to help prevent the further spread of the virus. Building on their longstanding collaboration, UNIFEM and UNAIDS had launched a Web portal on gender and HIV/AIDS to serve as a globally accessible and comprehensive source of information.

15. Information- and communications-technology initiatives had been launched not only to provide information on gender issues but to strengthen women's participation and economic capacity. Such technologies enabled women to gain and share knowledge and were also a tool to conduct business and reach national and international markets.

16. As a small and catalytic fund, UNIFEM was aware that its effectiveness was directly related to its ability to attract and sustain partnerships. It would continue to expand its partnerships within and beyond the United Nations system to ensure the implementation of commitments for women's empowerment and gender equality.

17. **Ms. Acar** (Chairperson, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) said that, during its two sessions of 2003, the Committee had considered the reports of 16 States parties. Several of those States parties had ratified the Convention many years earlier and, while the Committee was very concerned about the significant delay in submitting some of the reports, it was pleased that they allowed for a comprehensive examination of women's human rights in the respective State party. Moreover, many States parties had been represented by high-level delegations that included technical experts, which had permitted meaningful and thorough consideration of the implementation of the Convention in their countries. The Committee hoped that its concluding comments would lead to specific follow-up action in the area of legislative initiatives, policy and programme development, and administrative and other measures.

18. The Committee remained concerned that States parties did not consistently reflect in their domestic legislation the definition of discrimination against women set out in the Convention and that there was a lack of clarity regarding the direct applicability of the Convention in the States parties. Likewise, the lack of systematic data on and light penalties for violence against women continued to be issues of concern, as was the status of women's human rights as enshrined in the Convention in the post-war era in Iraq, which was a State party to the Convention.

19. During the past year, in addition to reviewing the reports of States parties, the Committee had continued to implement its mandate under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the right of petition and anticipated that, at future sessions, that aspect of its work would demand an increasing amount of time and attention.

20. The issues of non-reporting and significant delays in reporting by States parties had been a source of great concern to the Committee for some time. Consequently, it had decided to adopt an incremental approach to encourage reporting and, for the first time, had met with representatives of States parties whose reports were more than five years overdue to identify ways of helping them prepare their reports. Subsequently, letters had been sent to the 29 States parties whose initial reports were five years overdue informing them that they could submit all their outstanding reports in one document. Furthermore, the Committee was proposing that the country offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) should support the reporting efforts and had advised States parties about other possible sources of support, including the technical assistance offered by the Division for the Advancement of Women.

21. While burdensome, States parties should consider reporting to be a primary obligation assumed upon ratifying the Convention. Preparation of a report was an excellent opportunity for broad-based public debate on the status of women's human rights in the country concerned by all stakeholders, and the occasion to evaluate or develop legislative and policy initiatives to enhance compliance with the Convention.

22. The Committee was endeavouring to improving its working methods and, during the past two sessions, had paid particular attention to proposals for an expanded core document, targeted reports and follow-up to concluding comments. It was also considering the possibility of considering periodic reports in parallel working groups rather than in plenary, because 32 reports were awaiting consideration and the number could increase. The alternative was to request the General Assembly to grant a third annual session on a regular basis, but many Committee members would find that difficult to accommodate in their schedules. The Committee would be discussing the question at its thirtieth session, in January 2004.

23. The Committee continued to benefit from the input and interest of non-governmental organizations in its work. At the same time, it encouraged the contribution to the reporting process of entities of the United Nations system and their support for the

implementation of the Convention at the national level. Lastly, members of the Committee continued to promote implementation of the Convention in many different ways and should be thanked for their commitment and dedication.

24. **Ms. Prestigiacomo** (Italy) said that it would be useful to know the basis on which the Secretariat had prepared the review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly for the Commission on the Status of Women in 2005.

25. **Ms.** Jo-Phie **Tang** (Singapore), referring to the report of the Secretary-General on violence against women migrant workers (A/58/161), said that paragraph 49 indicated that, when examining the initial and second periodic report of Singapore, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had expressed concern that foreign domestic workers were prohibited from working during criminal proceedings against their employers, which forced them to leave Singapore without waiting to receive compensation from them. She wished to make a clarification that foreign domestic workers could continue to seek employment and be employed by a different employer in Singapore during the investigation and prosecution; and, after the case had been concluded, a foreign domestic worker could continue to be employed in Singapore.

26. **Mr. Laurin** (Canada) said that the new system of human-resource management at the United Nations gave decentralized authority to each manager to ensure the equal representation of women at all levels. It would be useful to know whether that measure had translated into an effective increase in the number of women in the United Nations system. Furthermore, he would like to know what type of actions Member States could take to improve the gender balance in the United Nations system, both within and outside the Secretariat.

27. **Ms. King** (Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women), responding to the question posed by Italy, said that the review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly by the Commission on the Status of Women in 2005 would be based on progress reports submitted by Member States in the context of the twenty-third special session and the conferences on social development and sustainable development. It would also be based on national human-development reports, Millennium Development Goals reports, poverty-reduction-strategy papers and information from other sources, including the United Nations Statistics Division. In addition, a questionnaire was being sent out to Member States to gather information on critical areas, priorities, best practices and any other relevant information. Responses were required by April 2004.

28. In answer to the question posed by Canada regarding the new staffing system introduced in May 2002 and how it had translated into an increase in the number of women, the system had initially focused on filling posts and delegations. Her office was working with the Office of Human Resources Management and the Department of Management to review and monitor the system. It was necessary to develop strategies for the recruitment and promotion of women and also to increase the number of women working in the United Nations. That would require a strong monitoring system and the training of programme managers at all levels, because there was still a preference for selecting men in the United Nations system, particularly in non-traditional areas such as peacekeeping. However, States could help by encouraging women with the necessary qualifications to apply and by proposing specific regulations for United Nations bodies and agencies.

29. **Ms. Al Haj Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the various reports submitted under items 110 and 111 appeared to be based on information provided by Member States. However, the Syrian Arab Republic rejected the information regarding it contained in the report of the Secretary-General on traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls (A/58/169), because it did not reflect the information provided in the report submitted under the Convention in April 2003. The information in the Secretary-General's report should be corrected and replaced with the information contained in the Syrian report.

30. The Syrian Arab Republic was satisfied with the way the Secretary General's report on the follow-up and progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session (A/58/166) reflected the measures taken by the General Assembly and other United Nations bodies. However, it failed to mention the decision taken by the Committee on the

Elimination of Discrimination against Women regarding Palestinian women, when speaking of the assistance provided to women in situations of armed conflict; that adversely reflected the situation of Arab women suffering under occupation and gave the impression that there was an element of selectiveness in dealing with women's issues.

31. **Ms. Gonzalez Fraga** (Cuba) said that the Secretary-General's report (A/58/166) did not examine progress and follow-up in the critical areas of concern. In addition, as it did not contain statistics for the past year, it was not possible to judge progress made. Her delegation would like to know why the report did not deal with that issue.

32. The Secretary-General's report on INSTRAW (A/58/417) was pessimistic about the future operation of the Institute. It would be useful to know when the new Director would be appointed and whether there were plans to revitalize the Institute.

33. The Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women had referred to the possibility of organizing parallel working groups to review the reports of States parties. Cuba would like to know what criteria would be used to distribute the reports among the groups.

34. **Mr. Bazel** (Afghanistan) thanked the Executive Director of UNIFEM for drawing attention to the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan.

35. **Mr. de Rivero** (Peru) asked what the Division for the Advancement of Women was doing to ensure that women played a larger role in peacekeeping operations.

36. **Ms. Simonović** (Croatia), referring to the Secretary-General's report in document A/58/166, said that it recommended continuing efforts to include a gender perspective in all reports to the General Assembly. It would be useful to know what percentage of reports had a gender perspective.

37. **Ms. Hannan** (Director, Division for the Advancement of Women) said that she had taken note of the clarification made by Singapore. Regarding the concerns raised by the Syrian Arab Republic, she would follow up on the points raised and respond later.

38. In answer to the representative of Cuba, she said that the Secretary General's report in document A/58/166 was one of three complementary reports, each one with a different substantive focus in order to avoid repetition. The report to the Commission on the Status of Women focused on efforts within the United Nations system; the report to the Economic and Social Council looked at what the Council itself was doing to incorporate a gender perspective into its work; and the report to the General Assembly looked at the major events organized by the General Assembly and the work of its main committees.

39. In answer to the question posed by Croatia, only the resolutions of the General Assembly had been examined to evaluate whether they included a gender perspective. Lastly, in response to the question posed by Peru regarding efforts to support women in peacekeeping, the Division had been providing capacity-building, through its technical-assistance programme, to women leaders in Africa to support peace-building efforts. It had also supported the Department for Disarmament Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to help them bring a gender perspective into their work on peacekeeping and peace-building.

40. **Ms. King** (Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women), referring to measures to increase the participation of women in peacekeeping, said that her Office was working in collaboration with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs and with the special representatives of the Secretary-General. Her Office had also prepared a report assessing the gender mainstreaming and gender perspective content of over 260 country-mission reports to the Security Council. Regrettably, 67 per cent of them did not mention women or girls; only about 17 per cent had some content and 15 per cent made a vague reference. Over the past year the number of women involved in peacekeeping had declined slightly. Her Office had stressed the importance of including gender advisers in missions, but, in terms of financing, that category had the lowest priority.

41. With regard to INSTRAW, she said that the Working Group on the Future Operation of INSTRAW had approved four candidates for the post of director and interviews were due to be held soon, so she was confident that a director would be appointed shortly. The process of replacing professional staff who had decided to leave the organization was already under

way and should be completed quite soon after the arrival of the new director. As for the future of the Institute, she understood that at least seven months' funding was available, but she would be better placed to comment on that when the financial report was available.

42. **Ms. Acar** (Chairperson, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) said, in reply to questions raised by the representative of Cuba, that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had requested the Secretariat to prepare a background note on the possibility of holding parallel sessions and would be considering the implications of doing so — including the implications for the Committee's rules of procedure — at its session in January 2004. She stressed that there was clearly a pressing need for some practical action and that the procedure would apply only to the periodic reports, not the initial reports, of States parties. The Committee was studying the option not only because of the backlog, but also because it recognized that delaying its consideration of reports submitted on time was a disincentive for the timely submission of reports.

43. **Ms. Heyzer** (Executive Director, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)) said that she was very grateful to the Government of Afghanistan for its support and cooperation with her organization in the area of constitutional reform and in preparing women to participate in the electoral process. As far as its contribution to peace-building was concerned, UNIFEM was focusing on ensuring that women participated in the work on constitutional and legal reform and in the new institutions that were emerging, so that they would be able to play a key role in democratization.

44. **Ms. Durán** (Spain), speaking as Chairperson of the Working Group on the Future Operation of INSTRAW, said she wished to clarify some points raised in the Secretary-General's report (A/58/417). First, with regard to the appointment of a new director, the Working Group had been officially notified of a shortlist of three candidates and had heard later that a fourth was also under consideration. As two of the official candidates were from the same country, the Working Group had asked the Secretariat to take into account the need for adequate regional representation. Second, she disputed the conclusion in paragraph 19 of the report that no progress had been made in implementing the institutional reform endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 57/175: a number of changes proposed by the Working Group had in fact already been implemented, the statute of the Institute had been amended and several donor meetings had been organized. In that connection, she pointed out that the Institute had yet to receive the updated information on its budget and financial situation despite having requested it on several occasions. Lastly, she pointed out that the report of the Working Group had not yet been circulated because the Secretariat had been unable to obtain permission to organize a meeting at which it could be formally adopted.

45. **Ms. Rasheed** (Observer for Palestine) asked why the situation of Palestinian women living under Israeli occupation was not reflected in the report on the follow-up to and progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session (A/58/166).

46. **Ms. King** (Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women) said that she had taken careful note of the comments by the representative of Spain. She agreed that the conclusion that no progress had been made did not perhaps properly reflect the true situation at the time when the report had been issued, but she thought it might have been referring to the issue of liaison with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the details of which remained to be worked out. With regard to appointments, she was optimistic that when a new director was appointed it would be possible to create a post of deputy director with specific fund-raising responsibilities. Lastly, she said she would ensure that the Secretariat was aware of the concerns expressed by the representative of Spain concerning information on the financial situation of INSTRAW.

47. **Mr. de Rivero** (Peru) speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean had taken a number of steps to follow up on the commitments entered into by the countries of the Rio Group at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. One of the main achievements of the regional conference had been the development of gender-based indicators and the creation of region-wide databases that would allow better comparisons of social data from the countries of the region. Significant progress had been made throughout the region in the five

priority areas identified in the Beijing Platform for Action, with the overall aim of promoting equal conditions and opportunities for women and guaranteeing the full observance of their human rights. However, a number of challenges remained: women suffered disproportionately from poverty, discrimination against them persisted in secondary and further education and in the workplace, and they played little part in politics or government.

48. In response to those challenges, the heads of State of the Rio Group had agreed to give high priority to combating poverty, to continue to promote the inclusion of a gender perspective in their development policies, and to enhance programmes that targeted women from the most disadvantaged groups, such as indigenous women or women of African descent. They had also agreed to encourage young people to take an interest in politics and to set up special programmes to prepare women, young people and people from ethnic or marginalized groups for political leadership, so that they would be fully involved in the development process. In that connection, he reiterated the Rio Group's full support for the strengthening of INSTRAW and called on the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Working Group on the Future Operation of INSTRAW, to appoint a new director for the Institute soon in order to enable it to carry out the necessary reforms.

49. One challenge that was proving particularly difficult to surmount was the one posed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which was a major obstacle to the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and threatened to reverse decades of hard-won progress in the fields of human rights and development. The members of the Rio Group intended to tackle the problem of HIV/AIDS in women and girls in a holistic way, as it had many ramifications beyond health and required action at all levels of government, as well as by civil society and the private sector. He emphasized the important role of civil society in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session, and recognized the usefulness of the work done by the Commission on the Status of Women and by UNDP in monitoring and implementing those outcomes.

50. *Ms. Londoño (Colombia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

51. **Ms. Prestigiacomo** (Italy), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the acceding countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia and the associated countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, welcomed the award of the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize to the Iranian human rights defender Shirin Ebadi, who she trusted would enjoy the full support of the Iranian Government in the pursuit of her mission.

52. The European Union recognized that equality, sustainable development and peace could only be achieved if both men and women were able to play a full part in all walks of life, and it fully supported the gender-mainstreaming strategy adopted by the United Nations. However, despite the efforts made, gender equality was not yet a reality in the Organization's day-to-day political and administrative work: gender issues must be fully taken into account in the implementation of the Millennium Declaration and related resolutions and priority should be given to monitoring existing gender policies in order to identify and replicate best practice.

53. Gender equality in decision-making was a prerequisite for democracy and had been the subject of a conference organized recently by the Presidency of the European Union, focusing on the need to achieve a better balance between women and men in political and economic decision-making. Gender equality was also a basic requirement for truly sustainable development, in that the empowerment of women was an effective way to combat poverty, hunger and disease. There was also a positive relationship between the education of women and girls and their meaningful participation in development; all States must therefore live up to their commitments to achieve the objectives of the Millennium Declaration.

54. Inequality and poverty prevented women and girls from enjoying their right to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Greater efforts were needed to ensure they had universal access to essential health-care services, especially in the field of sexual and reproductive health. In that connection, the European Union warmly welcomed the recent agreement to facilitate the import of essential drugs by developing countries. The right of women to make their own decisions on matters concerning their bodies, reproduction and sexuality must also be recognized.

55. Intergovernmental discussions had recently begun to focus more on the situation of rural women; the European Union believed that those women should be involved more closely in formulating policies that affected them. Women's participation in general was a key element in emergencies, humanitarian activities, peacekeeping and post-conflict activities. Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, could only be fully implemented if there was greater recognition of that fact. More needed to be done to protect them from sexual violence in times of war and to punish those who violated the international laws that prohibited it: the European Union called on all States that had not yet done so to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and to cooperate actively with the Court. All other kinds of violence against women were equally unacceptable and were a major obstacle to the full enjoyment by women and girls of their human rights. The European Union therefore called on all States to step up their efforts to prevent and punish such violence and to support the adoption of all international instruments designed to combat trafficking in human beings, including the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (the Palermo Protocol).

56. The European Union was concerned about the growing number of reservations entered in respect of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, and called on States to review any reservations they had with a view to withdrawing them. It urged all States that had not yet done so to consider ratifying the Optional Protocol and also urged all States to accept the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention, to give the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women greater flexibility in fulfilling its mandate. The European Union welcomed the progress made by the Commission on the Status of Women in improving its working methods, but was very disappointed that it had failed at its forty-seventh session to adopt the draft of its agreed conclusions on the elimination of violence against women. The European Union wished to highlight the important role played by the high-level round table on institutional capacity-building held at the Commission's 2003 session, and commended the work of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women. More generally, the European Union encouraged all the human rights treaty bodies to monitor more effectively the human rights of women and to integrate a gender perspective into their work.

57. **Mr. Kadiri** (Morocco), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the international community, in adopting the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, had committed itself to protect and promote for women the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to strive towards gender equality, empowering and promoting women at all levels. Those commitments and their review continued, and formed an important part of the global objective of reducing gender discrimination and ensuring that women, like men, were an integral part of and equal partners in all aspects of life. Despite efforts spanning a decade, women still did not fully enjoy their rights. The Group called on the international community, through a firm and universal political will, to do all in its power to overcome those barriers in order to accelerate the implementation of those commitments.

58. It was a source of gratification that the many recent United Nations conferences and summits had integrated a gender perspective into their outcome documents and had reaffirmed the need for gender equality and the imperative role of women in development. It now remained for that integration to be translated into action in national, regional and international policies and programmes. The Group welcomed the conclusions adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women on its priority theme, "Participation and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women" for the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society. The Commission had urged all relevant stakeholders to enhance efforts to reduce the digital and information divide between developed and developing countries for the benefit of women and girls; therein lay one of the key issues on the agenda of the forthcoming Summit.

59. Regarding implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, the Group had submitted a draft resolution placing special emphasis on older women and calling for greater intergovernmental and United Nations cooperation.

60. Elimination of the various manifestations of violence against women should be at the centre of all

efforts for the advancement of women, and called for multidimensional strategies at all levels, with the participation of the United Nations and other stakeholders. The media and civil society had a responsibility to raise awareness of the severe consequences of violence for women's physical and mental health and their social participation, and could also offer assistance to victims.

61. Although the primary responsibility for the advancement of women lay with Governments, the fact that globalization posed serious challenges to developing countries imposed the need for international cooperation in matters of technology transfer, information and data sharing, technical assistance, resource mobilization, and increased official development assistance. Policies should also promote women's participation in the economic, political and social spheres, integration of gender perspectives into legislation, public policies and programmes on education, decision-making, strengthening of mechanisms for women's issues and the eradication of poverty. The feminization of poverty was caused by the dire poverty of rural women. However, allowed to use their full potential, women could be instrumental in their support for efforts to fulfil internationally agreed commitments to poverty eradication and sustainable development.

62. The Group applauded the increasing attention paid to women's issues within the United Nations main bodies, as stated in document A/58/166, thus confirming the international resolve to give such issues their rightful place in the Organization's agenda. It also commended the sterling efforts of the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women to integrate a gender perspective into United Nations activities, including peacekeeping.

63. The Group reiterated its full support for the work of INSTRAW, whose future operation had been the subject of General Assembly resolution 57/175, and regretted the Secretary-General's failure to appoint forthwith a director of the Institute at the D-2 level, to be based in the Dominican Republic, thus impairing its functioning. It was vital that that resolution should be implemented. He welcomed the Economic and Social Council's decision to create a 10-member Executive Board, which would have a positive impact on the Institute. Despite his conviction that past and future measures and the important work of the Working Group would do much to revitalize INSTRAW, its sustainability depended on the international community's political and financial support.

64. **Ms. Meifang Zhang** (China) said that the Beijing Conference had given rise to universal consensus on promoting women's advancement, upholding their rights and interests, eliminating violence against them and ensuring gender equality. Since the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, United Nations peacekeeping operations had assigned an important place to protecting women and children in armed conflicts and giving women a role in post-war reconstruction. Her delegation supported the adoption of the conclusions of the Commission on the Status Women's in-depth discussion of women's human rights, and women and the media, held in March 2003, which had underscored the need to protect women's rights, eliminate discrimination and violence against women as the essential guarantee of their advancement, and enable them to take advantage of information and communications technologies.

65. Her delegation endorsed the conclusions and recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General (A/58/166), in which he stressed the need for States to strengthen their legislative efforts, suppress and severely punish violence against women and take stringent measures against trafficking in women and girls, and the indispensable role of women in promoting peace and security and in sustainable development.

66. China had acceded to numerous international human rights instruments and was formulating or improving laws and regulations for the protection of the rights of women and girls and the prosecution of their abusers. In parallel, the Government was strengthening the training of law-enforcement personnel to inculcate the importance of protecting women and their rights. China's Programme of Action for the Development of Women in China from 2001-2010 embodied new approaches to all aspects of gender equality. To that end, the Government stood ready to enhance its collaboration with civil society and the private sector, including women's groups.

67. **Mr. Duque Estrada Meyer** (Brazil), said that Brazil remained fully committed to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session, bestowing, as they did, legitimacy on the objectives of gender equality and

the empowerment of women and providing motivation for ensuring a better, more equal future for women and girls.

68. Brazil's frank and comprehensive report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the result of a collective effort by women's human-rights experts, civil society and the appropriate ministries, had given an overview of measures adopted since 1985, spelling out not only the advances regarding the rights of Brazilian women, but also the challenges involved in validating them. The report and the ensuing recommendations constituted a valuable tool for improving the living conditions of the country's women and girls. Brazil was proud to host and be involved in the preparation of the forthcoming meeting organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women to discuss the role of males in promoting gender equality.

69. In addition to its permanent goals of eradicating poverty and enhancing the rights of all citizens, the new Government had recently launched the Zero Hunger Programme, a cornerstone of the President's policies, involving all ministries, the three levels of government and the general public. The Programme attacked the structural causes of poverty through a wide array of social initiatives, many of which focused on women. One major action was the issuance of a bank card, preferably to the female head of low-income families, on the grounds of women's superiority in expense management. The authorities were, however, aware that the eradication of poverty necessitated altering the concepts, structures and cultural perspectives that kept women in a situation of submissiveness, maintained their unequal access to economic, political and social resources and undermined their right to development.

70. Although much remained to be done, those initiatives attested to Brazil's unwavering dedication to women's rights, to multilateralism through active cooperation with the United Nations as a whole, and to the fulfilment of its international obligations.

71. **Mr. Amurani-Phiri** (Malawi), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), associated himself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and reaffirmed SADC's commitment to the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session. The past decade had witnessed a significant increase in the understanding of and commitment to gender equality and the advancement of women, as well as the consistent inclusion of the gender perspective in the outcome documents of major United Nations conferences. The report of the Secretary-General (A/58/166) provided a comprehensive account of progress achieved in the integration of a gender perspective into preparations for the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society.

72. Since gender equality was an essential element of people-centred development, he applauded the recommendation on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all United Nations policies and programmes, achieved with the support of the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, which would afford more effective monitoring and evaluation of achievements and obstacles. With regard to UNIFEM, he said its three main objectives were in line with SADC's own focus, and hailed its progress in demonstrating the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment to both human development and security. He encouraged Member States and donors to increase support to that Fund and give serious consideration to the recommendations contained in the report of UNIFEM (A/58/168).

73. SADC's 1997 Declaration on Gender and Development, the 1998 Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women, and its 1999 Plan of Action for Gender provided the major guidelines for the attainment of gender equality within the Community, which continued to work diligently towards the attainment of a minimum target of 3 per cent for women in politics and decision-making positions by 2005. SADC was also firmly committed to promoting women's full access to and control over productive resources, which constituted a major step towards their empowerment. To that effect, the Women in Business Trade Fair and Investment Forum, now held biennially, provided women with investment and other opportunities in a male-dominated world.

74. The imbalance in power relations between women and men increased the former's vulnerability to HIV infection. The landmark 2003 Maseru Declaration on Combating HIV/AIDS by SADC heads of State called for the creation of an environment conducive to gender balance, broad-based socio-

economic development and eradication of the underlying factors that led to the spread of HIV infection, as well as for more intensive provision of appropriate reproductive health services for all. On the subject of women's health, the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report (A/58/169) deserved serious consideration. The Women's Charter for Africa on Women's Human Rights, currently being drafted, would be an innovative tool for development and for sustaining the livelihoods of women. SADC condemned all forms of violence against women, as well as traditions and customs that adversely affected the health of women and girls.

75. Committed to the elimination of all aspects of discrimination against women, SADC member states thanked the Department of Economic and Social Affairs for the technical assistance they had received to help them meet their reporting obligations under the Convention by enabling them to participate in a training workshop on reporting for government officials and on the national enforcement of human-rights law, hosted by the Tanzanian Government. Furthermore, African leaders, meeting in Maputo in July 2003, had identified the need for a significant shift towards fair representation of women, especially in decision-making, in African Union structures. To that end, a gender task force had been created to mainstream gender issues in all activities under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and SADC countries were prepared to make inputs into the NEPAD process for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, especially the goal concerning gender equality.

76. **Mr. Seyed Salehi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) expressed his delegation's congratulations to Iranian human rights activist Shirin Ebadi on winning the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize, an award that confirmed the immense ability of Iranian women. The authorities were committed to supporting her and all Iranian women in their quest for further empowerment, a topic that was constantly re-examined nationally and globally to ensure that women occupied their rightful place in all aspects of life, thus leading to a just social order.

77. Gender discrimination, which in many countries started in the cradle, was rooted in social practices and posed a serious problem for social development worldwide. One crucial challenge was the collective endeavour to integrate a gender perspective into national, regional and international policies, programmes and decision-making, since lack of access to economic opportunities, basic social services and decision-making made women more susceptible to repression that could lead to violence.

78. Despite the myriad global initiatives of the previous two decades to promote and enforce women's rights, progress had been slow. The global phenomenon of violence against women took various forms and perpetuated an adverse impact on their physical, and psychological well-being, and called for a collective effort on the part of all stakeholders and for coordinated governmental and non-governmental action, bolstered by legal, social and media support, and awareness-raising and networking campaigns.

79. With greater participation of women in the social, economic and cultural spheres high on the Government's agenda, the percentage of social participation of women, female literacy, university students and life expectancy had increased considerably. Gender perspective and mainstreaming had been integrated into the Fourth Five-Year Economic, Social and Cultural Development Plan, and efforts to accelerate women's empowerment were being made within numerous government structures in terms of budget allocation, number of women's non-governmental organizations, legislation on women's rights, gender-based information, and measures on behalf of increased women's overall participation.

*The meeting rose at 1.10 p.*m.